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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: PREM ON THAKSIN

REF: A. BANGKOK 03916 (WHAT'S THAKSIN UP TO?)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3538 (THAILAND CELEBRATES ITS KING)

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: I met General Prem on July 5, and discussed the rising political tensions caused by PM Thaksin, who launched a thinly-veiled attack on Prem last week. Prem expressed disappointment over Thaksin's actions, which have stirred emotions up again, after a period of calm during the King's anniversary celebrations, but he gave no sign of planning any kind of counterattack. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) I called on Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda on July 5. General Prem, one of the most highly respected leaders in Thailand, was the target of a lightly-veiled attack by Prime Minister Thaksin last week (ref A). Thaksin referred to an "individual with charisma," who was "outside the Constitution," trying to bring down the government and become Prime Minister himself. Thaksin's comments were construed by many as an open declaration of war against Prem, all the more surprising (or foolhardy) given Prem's stature and close relationship with the King. Meeting Prem at his home, I joked that he seemed to be exuding charisma. Prem immediately launched into a 50 minute discourse on "what makes Thaksin tick?"

[1](#)3. (C) Prem said that, over Thaksin's first five years as prime minister, he had not met much with Prem; Thaksin thought he knew everything already. For the past few months, however, Thaksin had sought out Prem more often. Prem said, "He sat right where you are," made polite small talk and sought counsel on the political situation. Prem was therefore shocked to hear the accounts of Thaksin's speech last week. At first, he couldn't believe the reports, especially when he realized that Thaksin had not been speaking off the cuff, but from a prepared speech. Prem's first thought was, "What does he think he's doing?" (Comment: our question as well. End comment.)

[1](#)4. (C) Following the PM's bombshell, many journalists and others have pressed Thaksin to disclose the identity of the unnamed "charismatic individual." Prem sent word to Thaksin that it would help the PM politically if he made clear that he was not referring to Prem. Thaksin disregarded the advice, giving the same response he's been giving to the press: "I'm not talking about that anymore." (Note: Various Thai Rak Thai representatives have tried for days to ratchet down the controversy; on July 5, the government spokesman finally announced that the "charismatic person" was "an ordinary person," not Privy Councillor Prem. End note.)

[1](#)5. (C) Prem bemoaned the fact that Thaksin had stirred everything up again, after a period of calm around the King's anniversary celebration. I noted that Thaksin didn't seem to

be able to keep himself from making these provocative statements. Prem remarked that from the outset of his time as Prime Minister, Thaksin had been personally unprepared for the fawning reception he gets, especially when he travels around the country. It had gone to his head, Prem said, and made him believe that "he's number one." But Thailand was not like America, Prem added. "We already have a number one." Thaksin needed to learn that he was the manager of the shop, not the owner. The people upcountry liked Thaksin and voted for him, but they didn't revere him. After seeing the adoring crowds on June 9, a million people in their yellow shirts who waited for hours in the heat just to catch a glimpse of their King, Thaksin should understand that he cannot rival the King for the people's affection, Prem concluded (ref. B).

¶6. (C) Comment: General Prem showed more disappointment than anger over Thaksin's attack on him. He gave no sign of plotting a counter-attack, but his supporters (and many Thais, it seems) continue to be both puzzled and outraged; the belated statement by the government spokesman ostensibly clearing Prem of the charge has come too late to undo the damage from the PM's remarks. End Comment.
BOYCE